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INTELLIGENCE BRIEF

TRUCK TRAFFIC ON SELECTED ROADS
IN NORTH VIETNAM AND LAOS
DURING NOVEMBER 1964

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE
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TRUCK TRAFFIC ON SELECTED ROADS
IN NORTH VIETNAM AND LAOS
DURING NOVEMBER 1964*

According to ground observers, truck traffic since the end of the rainy season has moved at a fairly steady pace on certain roads in Laos that are used to supply Pathet Lao forces in northern and central Laos. Truck traffic on the only Communist-held road to southern Laos has not yet resumed, although recent aerial photography shows that trucks have returned to Bai Duc Thon, which was the location of an important military staging area for truck traffic before the rainy season and possibly indicates that truck traffic to southern Laos may resume soon.

Reports of ground observers on all routes seldom indicated what was being carried by the trucks. In some cases this was because the cargo was covered by canvas, although for route 7 it was because most of the trucks traveled during hours of darkness.

1. Route 7**

During October and November 1964, truck traffic on route 7 was observed primarily from several points about 10 miles west of Ban Ban. Ten large convoys (of 20 to 90 trucks) moved west during October; at least six large convoys moved west during November. Additional convoys during November may not have been reported, because of enemy patrolling that caused the road-watch teams to leave their posts on route 7. Almost all of the large convoys and most of the other trucks moved during the hours of darkness (1800 hours to 0600 hours). On one day in October, 116 trucks moved west in two convoys, whereas in November a 120-truck convoy, the largest convoy reported on route 7

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Since March 1964, moved west in a single day. During October and November the volume of traffic averaged more than 30 trucks per day on those days that the road was under observation. * A characteristic of reports of traffic on route 7 is that more trucks have been shown moving west than have been reported moving east. During October and November, three times as many trucks were reported moving west as moved east. Truck traffic on route 7 appears to have increased during November 1964 compared with November 1963. Last year, however, the road was under observation for only 4 days; so the sample for the month was very small. Because of enemy patrolling that caused the road-watch teams to leave their posts on route 7, road-watch reports were not available for at least 10 days of November 1964. The reason for so few days of coverage during November 1963 is not known. The figure for the average number of trucks moving per day in November 1963, therefore, may not be significant.

2. Route 12

Route 12 in Laos was under observation by road-watch teams every day in October and November 1964. Two observation points were located south of the North Vietnamese border, north of the junction with route 23, and another was about 30 miles west of the junction with route 23. Traffic past all points was very light, consisting of an average of five trucks moving both ways per day in November. This figure is two less than the number for October 1964 but is two more than for November 1963. In November 1964 the largest number of trucks moving past any point in 1 day on route 12 was 15 trucks. It was reported that many of the trucks traveling on route 12 were covered with brush or tree branches in an attempt to camouflage them.

Aerial photographs taken in September 1964 of the Bai Duc Thon staging area, located on route 12 in North Vietnam about 35 road miles from the Laotian border, showed that 24 buildings in the area had been dismantled and that only 6 buildings of any significance remained standing. ** Photographs [redacted] revealed a new staging

* Average daily traffic is computed by dividing the total number of trucks observed by the number of days that the road was under observation. For additional data, see the table.

** Aerial photography since the beginning of the rainy season has been of little value in determining the level of traffic on any of the main routes: examination of the photographs taken on many high-level and low-level missions found very few vehicles on [footnote continued on p. 3]

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area under construction at a location a few miles southwest of the former staging area and located on an old railroad spur that parallels route 12. Photographs taken [] revealed a large number of trucks in or near the area for the first time since the end of the rainy season. Thirty-three of these trucks were located parked in a field southwest of the staging area, and 13 were headed south on route 12. Although this number of trucks at Bai Duc Thon is small compared with the number often found there before the rainy season, the reason for even this number being there at this time is not known. Road-watch teams have not observed this number of trucks moving on route 12 in Laos, and route 23 to southern Laos is not yet open to traffic. It is possible that they are being used for bridge construction* on route 12 near the border and for road repair in preparation for re-opening route 23.

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3. Route 8

Reports from ground observers regarding route 8 have not been available since April 1964. It can be assumed, however, that the route is being used for truck traffic because aerial photography indicated that a log bypass was quickly constructed for a bridge that was destroyed by aerial bombardment.

4. Route 9

Although road-watch teams have not reported on route 9 since 24 August 1964, aerial photography reveals numerous wheel tracks in an area located near the junction of routes 9 and 91, about 3.9 nautical miles northwest of the Tchepone airfield at 16°45' N - 106°08' E (UTM coordinates XD 215523). This area is close to a trail network from North Vietnam that passes through the end of the demilitarized zone and Laos and is believed to be used for the infiltration of men and supplies to South Vietnam. The area contains at least 21 barracks-storage-type buildings that could be used to house men and materials

the roads in Laos and North Vietnam. Aerial photography has been of value in obtaining information on bridges and roads and on whether or not they are in condition to be used by truck traffic.

* Five bridges were under construction on route 12 between Bai Duc Thon and the Laotian border in October 1964. []

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for movement later down the trail network into South Vietnam. Photography indicates heavy use of roads in this area during the rainy season, continuing through November 1964.

5. Route 23

No truck traffic has moved over route 23 between route 9 and route 12 since May 1964. However, this section of route 23 was under observation at six points by road-watch teams, which reported that in November this section was used by villagers, Pathet Lao, or Viet Cong who walked over it, the last two almost entirely headed toward the south. The total number of Communist forces observed moving south past all six points amounted to over 300 men, but it is very difficult to determine how much duplication is included in this total. Only about 130 troops were reported to have moved south past a point on route 23 about 14 miles north of route 9 and that was observed during 28 days of the month. This figure may represent a more accurate estimate of the number that traversed the route; however, the watch team may have missed some troops that passed and other troops may have stopped at military areas before passing that point or may have used alternate trails in the area.

6. Route 6

Route 6 leads from Hanoi, North Vietnam, across the border through Samneua, Laos, and south of the town deteriorates into a trail leading to Ban Ban on route 7. Only a few vehicles, pack animals, and men have been observed moving south of the town of Samneua. Traffic on route 6, however, appears to have increased recently. Reports of road-watch teams on this road have come primarily from a location about 10 miles south of the town, so that troops and supplies moving south past the road-watch team could be used to support clearing actions against government and Meo guerrilla forces located in the hills southwest of the town. Reports for about 40 days in both October and November of 1964 show that truck traffic on route 6, although still at a low level, more than doubled in November to an average of five trucks both ways per day compared with an average of two trucks both ways per day in October. An unusual feature of truck traffic on this route was that in November some trucks were accompanied by soldiers

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on foot.* Foot traffic on route 6 in October 1964 consisted of small groups of soldiers (up to 30 men) moving north and south and one group of 17 Pathet Lao, 105 coolies, and 12 pack horses moving south. In November, foot traffic again consisted of small groups of soldiers moving in both directions and on one day of 100 Pathet Lao with mortars and recoilless rifles and 300 coolies carrying ammunition for mortars and recoilless rifles.

* The soldiers escorting the trucks may have been examining the roads for mines. Information received from ground observers indicates that a truck traveling over this route was damaged by a mine.

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Analysis of Truck Traffic Reported by Ground Observers on Selected Routes in Laos a/
November 1963 and October and November 1964

Route Number, Month, and Year	Number of Trucks Reported Moving			Maximum Number of Trucks Moving in Any One Day		Number of Days Covered by Reports	Average Number of Trucks Moving per Day ^{B/}
	West or South	East or North	Total	West or South	East or North		
Route 6 ^{c/}							
October 1964	27	21	48	15	15	20	2
November 1964	72	38	110	25	22	22	5
Route 7							
November 1963	78	100	178	50	100	4	45
October 1964	579	150	729	116	55	22	33
November 1964	381	127	508	120	50	15	34
Route 12							
November 1963	34	32	66	21	21	23	3
October 1964	94	112	206	10	10	31	7
November 1964	79	71	150	9	15	30	2

a. Based on road-watch traffic reports. Data may include double counting if the trucks passed more than one observation post along the route. Such duplication has been eliminated whenever possible.

b. Total number of trucks observed divided by the number of days covered by reports.

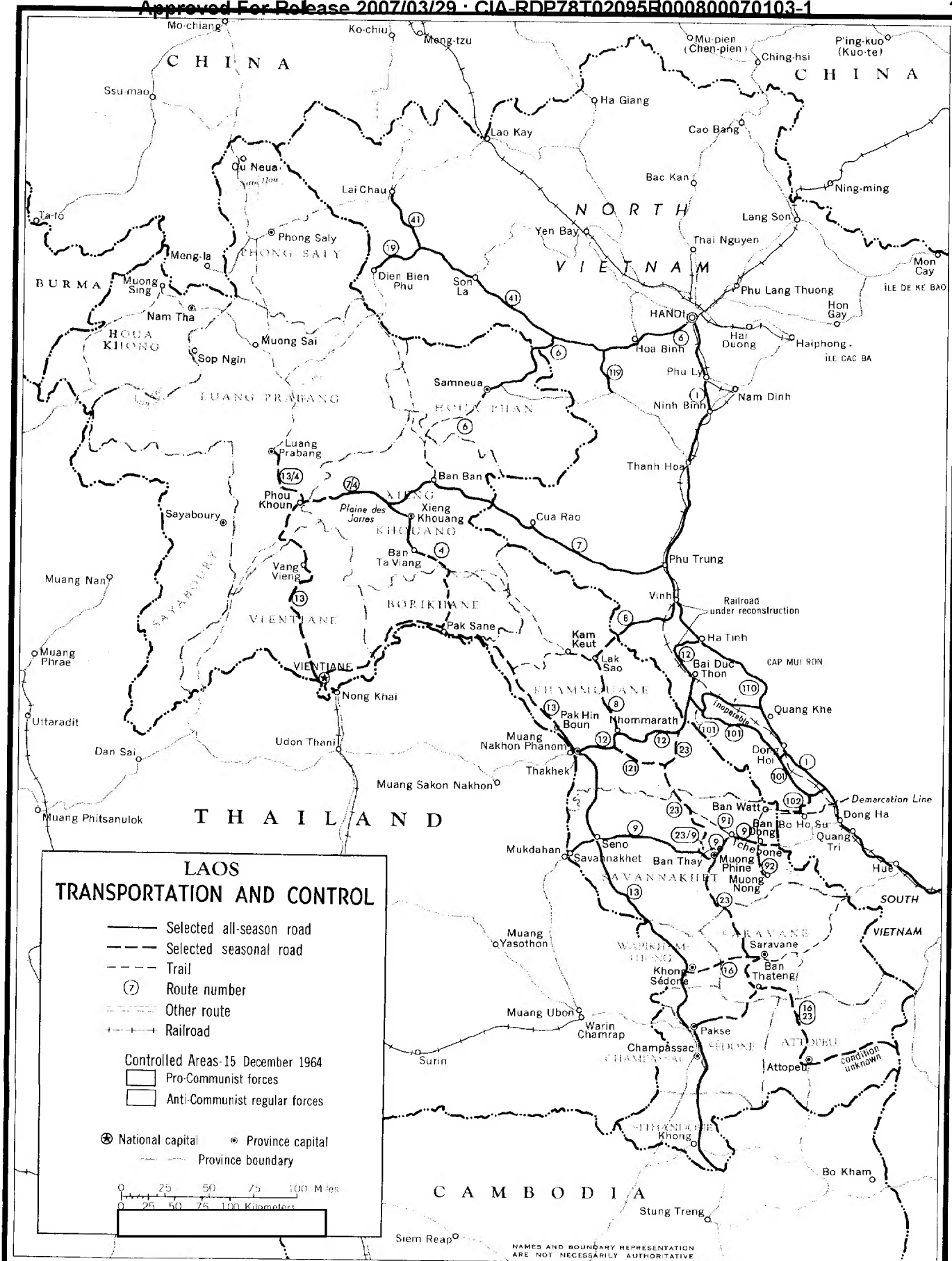
c. Compilation for this route not available for November 1963.

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